

"I'm tired of doing all the housework in this house every day," Uloma retorted to her mother angrily. "I can't even have any leisure time. I'm tired".

"Don't disrespect me, Uloma. I'm your mother. You can't speak to me like that."

"But, I've not said any disrespectful thing. All I'm saying is Chibuike has to do some work too. It can't be just me."

"Shut up. Chibuike does a lot more than you in this house. You are just very lazy. Is this how you'll behave in your husband's house? You are a badly behaved child. This is the main reason your dad was having suspicious thoughts that you're not his child."

"Maybe, he's really not my dad," Uloma replied and immediately went into her room.

"Come here," her mother screamed at her.

Uloma didn't come back. Her mom got even angrier and screamed again.

"You think you can misbehave because you've started growing breasts? I'm your mother and you can't outgrow me. You're just a child. Come back here."

Uloma sat quietly on the bed in her room. She's tired of the constant arguments she always had with her mother. The loud sound of a train can be heard almost immediately. She hated that sound. She never got used to the sound even though she and her family have lived near the rail track since was ten. She is sixteen now, struggling with so many things; financial struggles in the family, her relationship with her mum, and the never ending fights with her younger brother. She's not close to her brother at all. She even told her close friend Jumoke that she doesn't love him. She wishes she had someone else as a brother, not Chibuike. Both of them share nothing in common. They always have arguments, quarrel and sometimes, even fight.

It's exactly eight months since her father passed. The period after he died had been extremely stressful for her and her family. They had to leave their house in Lagos and travel to their hometown to organize a befitting burial that cost so much money. They had to cater for the mourners and sympathizers. Uloma could not understand why a grieving family should have to cater for so many people. They spent a few weeks in her hometown for the burial preparations and ceremony. Now they're back and settled in Lagos but life isn't the same anymore. The loss of the breadwinner of the family has made life harder for them. Now her mother depends on the generosity of one of their longtime family friend, Mr Madu.

Uloma liked staying in her room. It was her hiding place. Solitude is something she feels very comfortable in. She loves being left alone. It's her zone, her happy place. Being alone gives her a comfortable and happy feeling. It's like an addiction. In her room, she can avoid the company of her mother or her brother, Chibuike.

It was almost 7:30pm and she started to fall asleep when she heard a loud knock on her door.

"Who's that?" she asked.

"It's me, Chibuike," her brother replied.

She was expecting the person at the door to be her cousin Adaeze. Adaeze and Ugonna are the only relatives that live with them. She prefers the company of Adaeze. It's not that she likes her much but at

least she can tolerate her more. Ugonna is her male cousin. He works for Mr Madu. Mr Madu is a trader and Ugonna works for him in the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system. Ugonna will serve him for some years and afterwards, Mr Madu will give him some amount of money to set up his own business shop when he comes of age. Traditionally, the apprentice should live with the master but in this case, Ugonna is not staying with him because Mr Madu's wife, Ijeoma once complained that apprentices that live in their house often steal from them. So Mr Madu had to make arrangements for Ugonna to stay with Uloma's family.

"What do you want?" Uloma asked her brother, Chiubuike.

"Mummy said you should come and eat."

"I don't feel like eating anything," she replied him.

"Then come and tell her yourself."

"No, I won't. I'm very tired and sleepy."

"Uloma, come and tell mummy. She already put your food in a plate."

"Put it in the fridge, I can't eat it."

"Stand up and go put it yourself, lazy girl."

"Are you mad? Who are you describing as a lazy girl?"

"I'm not mad. You're the one who is mad."

"I'll give you a dirty slap."

"You can't. I dare you."

Uloma jumped out of her bed like a fiery tigress and landed a loud slap on Chibuike. They started fighting. He is taller than her but he is lanky like an antelope and his limbs are slow. Uloma is smaller but more agile. Their mum heard them fighting and rushed into the room to stop them.

"Who hit first?" Mrs Lotanna shouted.

"It's Uloma," Chibuike cried loud.

"Uloma, you again. You this child. This was why your late father never liked you. I'll flog you tonight for this. You're a bad daughter. Your brother is better than you."

Uloma stood up looking at her mother angrily. Her mother went out to get a cane but before she came back, Uloma had left the house and was walking towards the gate.

"Where are you going to?"

"To my friend's house."

"Which friend?"

"My friend."

"Who?"

Uloma didn't reply. She just walked faster, opened the gate and started walking in the lonely street. By 8:30pm, she arrived at her best friend's house. Jumoke welcomed her with open arms and gave her food to eat. They talked for over two hours. By 11pm, they both slept off.

The sounds of bleating goats could be heard very early the next morning when Uloma got back home. She had left her friend's house to see Mr Madu to tell him about what happened between her and her mother the night before. But when she got to Mr Madu's house by 6:30am, he wasn't around. His wife said he travelled in his car to the east for some housing project supervision. Uloma wasn't happy. Mr Madu has been very supportive to her since she lost her dad. He has taken up the role of a father. The fact that she looked so much like him made some strangers think that he is her real father anytime they are seen together. Uloma liked him. He was generous to her since her father died. He has been a good man.

She left Mr Madu's house and started going home. When she got home, she saw Chibuike and Ugonna at home sitting by the corridor.

"Is mummy inside?" she asked.

"No, she travelled early this morning." Ugonna replied.

"Didn't she tell you she'd travel? Chibuike asked.

"No, she didn't," Uloma replied.

Uloma wasn't too surprised. Everytime Mr Madu had travelled, by some coincidence, her mother travels the same day or the next day. This has been going on for as long as she can remember. She went inside her room. Adaeze was saying her morning prayers with her rosary in her hand. Uloma's late father, Mr Alozie was a devoted catholic. Her mother, Mrs Lotanna was born to a traditional worship family but after she got married to Alozie, she became a catholic. Mrs Lotanna father, Uloma's maternal grandfather was a well-known oracle in his hometown community. He was a popular Ezemmuo. Ezemmuo loosely translates as chief priest or mouthpiece of the gods. He was popularly known as Mazi Nwogu. Uloma knew a lot about him from the stories her mother told her.

Adaeze finished her morning prayers and greeted Uloma. She asked Uloma where she spent the night. They started discussing about everything. Uloma and Adaeze discuss everything. They have the same hobbies too; reading and surfing the internet. But while Adaeze likes boys and likes talking about them, Uloma is rarely interested in that. Adaeze is very fond of one boy in particular. His name is William.

"I can't wait for school to resume so I can see William again."

"Okay," Uloma replied with little interest.

She wasn't interested. She doesn't really care. She doesn't really like boys at all. She only pretended to do so in school because it was the popular thing among girls her age. She pretended to fit in. Now, she's tired of even pretending. Nothing about boys fascinate her. Nothing at all.

She went to the kitchen to get something to eat. It was almost 10am. She found some leftover food in the fridge and warmed it and ate. She could have cooked something to eat but she never really liked cooking. After she was done eating, she entered her room and laid on the bed. Adaeze had dressed up and left by then. Uloma just lay on the bed thinking about the disagreement she had with her mother

the night before, wondering where her mother was, why she had travelled suddenly that morning and why her mother always travels coincidentally whenever Mr Madu travels. She reminisced about some discussions she had with her mother about the family history, how she got married to late Mr Alozie, her late father and how they relocated to Lagos as a young couple.

Mr Alozie was a tall handsome man. Uloma's mother said she liked him because of his height and good looks. When they first met, young Lotanna wasn't interested because she was in a secret relationship with another very handsome man. His name was Ugochukwu. Ugochukwu was tall and light skin in complexion. He was the finest man in the hometown. And he was brave too. He was a popular hunter. Lotanna loved him so much. On one fateful full moon Friday night, in one of his hunting expeditions, he was attacked and killed by a leopard. Lotanna was extremely sad in the days after the incident. It was after Ugochukwu died that Lotanna started to show interest in Alozie. The relationship she had with Alozie wasn't an easy one because her father strongly disapproved of any man having anything to do with his daughter.

Mazi Nwogu, Lotanna's father was an oracle of a popular very powerful god called Ogbunabali. He worshipped Ogbunabali and often makes sacrifices to the god. Mr Nwogu had seven wives and over 40 children. After losing 4 infant children to a sudden sickness in a year, Mr Nwogu promised Ogbunabali that his most beautiful daughter Lotanna will be dedicated to the god. By dedication, she will become the 'wife' of the god and therefore will not be married to any mortal man on earth. No man should have carnal knowledge of her. Mazi Nwogu never lost any of his infant children again so he told Lotanna that she has to uphold the covenant for as long as she lives. Lotanna was about fifteen at the time Mazi Nwogu made the promise to his god. When she turned eighteen, on one Friday, Mazi Nwogu came to her bed at night, woke her up and took her to his shrine to perform the marriage ritual of his daughter to the god, Ogbunabali. His second wife, Lotanna's mother wanted to come with them. Her name was Adaugo.

"Adaugo stay back." He barked at her.

She shivered and stayed back in the room. Mazi Nwogu was a fiery man. All his wives and children were very scared of him.

He took Lotanna and they walked together through the lonely path that led to his shrine. It was almost midnight but they could see the pathway very clearly because the moon was full. It was over an hour after midnight when they returned from the shrine. The young Lotanna was now a wife of Ogbunabali.

So when a young man named Alozie started becoming friends with Lotanna about a year later, Mazi Nwogu had warned him to stay off his daughter. He even had to go see Alozie's father, Mazi Okafor to tell him to warn his son.

"Tell your son Alozie to stay off Lotanna. There are so many other young women in this community that he can pick from. He should stay off my daughter."

"Mazi, you know Alozie is a grown man. I can't really tell him what to do at his age."

"He is your son. Tell him."

"I will but I can't be certain that he will listen."

“That means he is not a good son. A good son will listen to his father no matter how old he is.”

“He is a good son.”

“Then that means you are not a good father. If you are a good father, then your good son will listen to you if you advise him.”

“Mazi, I’m not going to get into any argument with you.”

“I’m also not here to argue .”

“Okay. I’ll tell Alozie but I can’t be certain that he’ll take the advice.”

“He should take the advice for his own good. A father’s advice can save a child’s life.”

Mazi Okafor offered him a drink of palm wine. Mazi Nwogu took one gulp of the drink before standing up from the chair ready to leave. He started walking out of the compound. He walked with a slight limp.

“Take care,” Mazi Okafor told him.

“Goodbye.” Mazi Nwogu replied.

Alozie and Lotanna could barely see each other afterwards. Mazi Nwogu wouldn’t even let her go outside. Alozie left the hometown and relocated to Lagos. He got a good job offer there and stayed in Lagos permanently. But three years later, Mazi Nwogu passed away after a brief illness. When Alozie heard of his passing, he travelled back to meet Lotanna and told her they should get married immediately. Lotanna told him about the ritual in the shrine and the promise her father made to Ogbunabali.

“Lotanna, don’t worry about these things. I’ll take you to the church and the parish priest will say a prayer. These little gods don’t have no power. The church is more powerful. We worship the creator of the heavens and the earth. Besides, we will be moving to Lagos. These little gods only have little powers in the village. They don’t have any power in the city.”

Months later, they got married in the church and relocated to Lagos together.

Uloma was still on her bed thinking about all that had happened in the past between her and her mother. She remembered the night her dad passed away. She remembered how she sat on the veranda in their house on that Friday night. She remembered how bright the night was because of the full moon. She remembered how her mother and brother came home late that night from the hospital to inform her of the sad news.

She got bored of staying in her room and decided to go visit her friend Jumoke. She first entered her mother’s room to steal one of her handbags. She had promised Jumoke a bag as a gift. She searched and found a red bag. As she took it out, she dipped her hand inside to check if there’s anything in the bag. What she saw next sent some mild shock all over her body. She found twenty old pictures of Mrs Lotanna, her mother together with Mr Madu. Three of the pictures had dates that were years before she was born. She’s had so many questions on her mind for a long time but every time she wants to ask her mother, she dismisses her and tells her to go away. Now, she decided that she’ll ask Mr Madu.

When he comes back, she'll find a way to meet him in private and ask him. It was almost noon when she got to Jumoke's house. They both felt a strong attraction towards each other. They kissed each other on their lips. Afterwards, they went inside Jumoke's room and lay naked on the bed admiring each other's cone-shaped breasts.

Uloma went back home by 8pm that evening. It was a Friday. When she got home she saw her mum weeping. She tried to find out why she was crying.

"What happened?" Uloma asked.

"Mr Madu was involved in a car ghastly accident minutes ago. The paramedics said his chances of survival are very slim." Chibuike replied.

Uloma looked up at the bright sky. The moon was full.